



Puppies for PAROLE

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Windsor, Puppies for Parole Reach New Heights

*Australian Shepherd named Windsor celebrated as the
program's 500th dog*



Training dogs that have disabilities and behavioral disorders is nothing new to the Puppies for Parole Program. However, never before had a dog been trained that is both deaf and blind. That is, until now.

Offender handlers at Southeast Correctional Center did just that with a 6-month-old Australian Shepherd named Windsor. Windsor has a condition known as homozygous merle, which means Windsor carries the double merle gene. While the condition is not fatal, it can cause

vision and hearing impairments.

Alice Wybert, the director of the Safe Harbor Animal Shelter, said her shelter received Windsor when he was just 10 weeks old. She said a passerby saw him walking around in circles near a highway and stopped and picked him up.

"We had blind dogs. We had deaf dogs, but never deaf and blind," Wybert said. "Everybody loves him. He has such a unique and warm personality. We thought he had an excellent chance of responding to training. Windsor is very intelligent and so loving. I knew there had to be a special place for him.

Windsor's next stop would be Southeast Correctional Center in Charleston, where two offender handlers embraced the challenge of training a dog, who by all accounts, had been discarded by society.

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“We saw him as a unique challenge,” one of Windsor’s handlers said. “It wasn’t anything that he did or didn’t do that caused him to be blind and deaf. He deserves a chance and we want to give him that chance. We knew going in that we would have to utilize all our training abilities in order to pull it off.”

The handler said a common sense approach was utilized for Windsor’s training.

“He only has two senses available for us to utilize,” the handler said. “He has the sense of smell and touch. We realized from the start we would have to capitalize on these two senses. He has responded extremely well.”

Windsor’s handlers have trained him to respond to various touches across his body. For example, the handler will tap on Windsor’s rear when he is to sit.

“I would say he has responded as quickly, if not quicker, than any other dog we have trained to this point,” the handler said. “His problem-solving ability seems to be a lot stronger than in other dogs. We use a lot of positive reinforcement along with our touch commands to communicate.”

His handlers bragged that Windsor does not have the vices that other dogs do, like chewing on items he isn’t supposed to. They said overall, Windsor is a great companion and just wanted somebody to show him “the way” and give him love.

“For us this was a very rewarding experience,” Windsor’s handler said. “Knowing that you are doing something positive sets the stage for additional positive things to happen. This has been a tremendous opportunity.”

Windsor passed the Canine Good Citizenship Test and is awaiting adoption. The offenders at SECC paid his adoption fee to ensure he goes to a loving home. •

A Gentle Giant Finds a Home

Offenders provide Bernadette with love, and money for a much-needed eye surgery

The Saint Bernard breed is known to be gentle giants who were originally bred for Alpine rescues. Bernadette needed someone to rescue her. The 3-year-old female arrived at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center (ERDCC) in Bonne Terre malnourished and in need of eye surgery to correct a vision problem. The gentle giant found the help she needed in one of the most unlikely places.

The staff at ERDCC raised the money needed so Bernadette could get her surgery and the offenders gave her the love she needed to make a successful transition back into society.

The offender assigned to her had his hands full initially with Bernadette. She was undependable, aggressive and would not listen. With attention and patience, her handler was able to turn the corner with Bernadette.

“She just wanted someone to love her,” the offender handler said. “As much of a challenge that she was, I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to work with her. Puppies for Parole has allowed me to feel like I have purpose while I’m incarcerated.”

Bernadette’s handler said the program has not only impacted him, but also the offenders around him as well. He said they show each other more respect as result of it.

“It brings us together in a positive way,” he said. “The effects are far reaching. I talk to guys who normally I would not have a conversation with because of Puppies for Parole.”

He said Bernadette has passed all levels of testing required in the Canine Good Citizenship Test, other than the part that requires her to be around other dogs.



Bernadette’s handler helps her to sit and shake.

The handler said with a little more work, he is confident she will pass the final component.

After graduation from Puppies for Parole, Bernadette will move to her adopted home near Kansas City. A corrections officer who raises Saint Bernards adopted her. •

Sign of the Times

Hearing-impaired dogs continue to find a second chance through Puppies for Parole

Offender handlers at Potosi Correctional Center didn't know what they were in for when they agreed to train April. The 9-month-old Yorkie and Poodle mix was born deaf. Even though the handlers knew about the handicap before they agreed to take on April, what they didn't realize was the required patience that would be needed for her training.

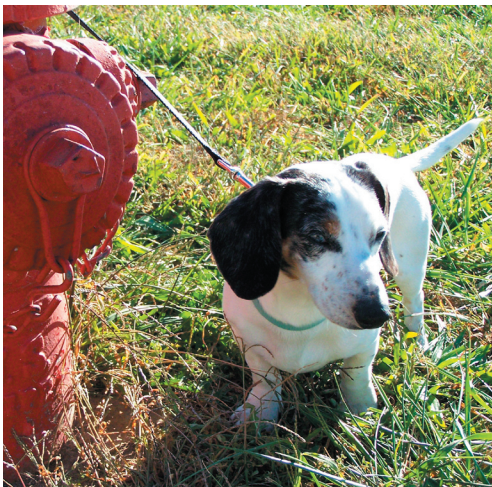
"Prior to the program, the shelter was having a really hard time with her," one handler said. "She was a little skittish and didn't know how to warm up to people."

The offenders utilized the American Sign Language Dictionary to learn how to sign. They learned the signs for sit, lay, come and shake.

"She quickly started picking up on the signs," the handler said. "Every day more of her personality comes out. This has been a life-changing event for me. Caring for another living being is a big responsibility. It's been a very uplifting experience and has encouraged me to turn my life around and focus on something positive."



April works on the "shake" command with her offender handler.



Zeus, a Dachshund now known as Sparky, was the program's first deaf dog.

April isn't the first deaf dog to be trained by offenders in the Missouri Department of Corrections (DOC). Earlier this year the DOC made worldwide headlines with the story of Zeus, later renamed Sparky. Zeus was born deaf. The birth defect rendered him useless to the breeder and his future was uncertain, at best. The Dachshund ended up at an animal rescue shelter where his handicap plagued any chance for adoption. The shelter reached out to Southeast Correctional Center in Licking.

After his training was complete, the offenders made sure Zeus would go to a home where he could help others. They paid the adoption fee and donated the dog to the Missouri School for the Deaf (MSD) in Fulton. He spends his days residing with the school's superintendent, Barbara Garrison, and making the rounds on campus. Zeus's story touched the hearts of many, and even was featured in *People* magazine. •

Soldier On

Retriever mix being trained to benefit veterans

Offender handlers at Alcoa Correctional Center are training a 2-year-old Golden Retriever and Labrador Retriever mix for the Mexico Veterans' Home. Soldier is nearing the end of his training and is expected to graduate from Puppies for Parole fittingly on or about Veterans Day.

Like other dogs in the program, Soldier was assigned to two offender handlers. They described him as hyper, but very intelligent when they first started working with him. They said when focused, he takes direction well.

"Working with Soldier has allowed me to work on improving my own patience," one of the handlers said. "By training him, it gives me an opportunity to give back to the community. I think that is great and I am just thankful I have this opportunity."

Both handlers agreed that their primary focus is on getting Soldier prepared to pass the Canine Good Citizenship Test that will be administered at the conclusion of his training. After he has mastered the skills necessary to pass the test, the handlers said they would like to teach him additional skills that will benefit the elderly and those with handicaps and disabilities.

"Puppies for Parole is a two-way street," the handler said. "Obviously, the program gives dogs a second chance. It also gives us a little companionship and teaches us about responsibility and compassion. It gives us a chance to give back. There isn't anything negative about this program; it's all good."



Soldier visits with a veteran during a recent trip to the Mexico Veterans' Home.

One of Soldier's handlers trained dogs with his aunt prior to incarceration. He said he has a passion for helping animals.

"My wife would always tell me, 'you can't save them all'," he said. "Maybe not, but I can make a difference, one dog at a time." •

Soldier brings a little joy to a bed-ridden veteran during a recent visit.

Captain or Doctor?

Captain Jack, a one-eyed and deaf terrier, first to receive PhD in Puppies for Parole

Captain Jack came into the Puppies for Parole Program (P4P) as a one-eyed, deaf Jack Russell who was nursing injuries from getting hit by a car. He left with a PhD in dog obedience. The 3-year-old terrier was on three months of bed rest from his injuries prior to his arrival at the Chillicothe Correctional Center (CCC).

“We knew he was going to have special needs,” said Heidi Woods, a case-worker and P4P co-coordinator at CCC. “Knowing that, we didn’t think most of our female offenders would want him. However, that wasn’t the case at all. In fact, several were disappointed because they didn’t get him.”

Captain Jack passed the Canine Good Citizenship Test in about six weeks. The test measures a dog’s aptitude in basic obedience. It is the benchmark used to gauge a canine’s progress at the conclusion of its training.

Only with Captain Jack, Woods and his offender handlers decided to take his training one step further. Well, actually two steps further. At eight weeks, Captain Jack received a bachelor’s certification, a more advanced degree of obedience, and at 11 weeks he obtained a PhD.

“As far as I know, he is the only dog in the program throughout the state who has obtained a PhD,” Woods said. “Typically, this certification is reserved for therapy or service dogs. He had so many special needs when he came here. After he passed the Canine Good Citizenship Test, we decided we wanted to show that dogs are extremely trainable despite their handicaps. He did so well in training at each



Captain Jack may have just one eye, but he has immeasurable intelligence and energy!

level. We just kept pushing him and he kept responding.”

Woods said Captain Jack is definitely a staff favorite. She said he has a unique personality and can be stubborn at times.

“He is Mr. Personality,” she said.

After graduation from the program, Captain Jack found a permanent home with Heddie Leger, the volunteer dog trainer at CCC. •

Puppies for Parole: Facts & Figures

- Puppies for Parole is currently in 14 of the department's institutions, with two additional facilities coming online in the near future.
- The program started on February 1, 2010, at the Jefferson City Correctional Center.
- The program received the Governor's Award in Innovation in 2010.
- Currently the program has 105 dogs in training.

All participating dogs must pass the Canine Good Citizenship Test prior to completion of the program.

- Dogs are trained in basic obedience.
- Each dog is assigned two offender handlers.
- Puppies for Parole is funded strictly by donations. No state revenue is spent on the program.
- Participating dogs that are available for adoption can be viewed online at <http://doc.mo.gov/division/dai/puppies.php>.

Looking Ahead.....



"In addition to training house dogs for mental health facilities, veterans homes and families across the state, we hope to expand our program to train dogs in a more extensive fashion to benefit disabled veterans upon their return from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. We hope to work with our female institution in Chillicothe to accomplish this."

"We will also continue to help children with Autism and other individuals with special needs who can benefit from the companionship of canines trained in Puppies for Parole."

- George A. Lombardi
Director
Missouri Department of Corrections